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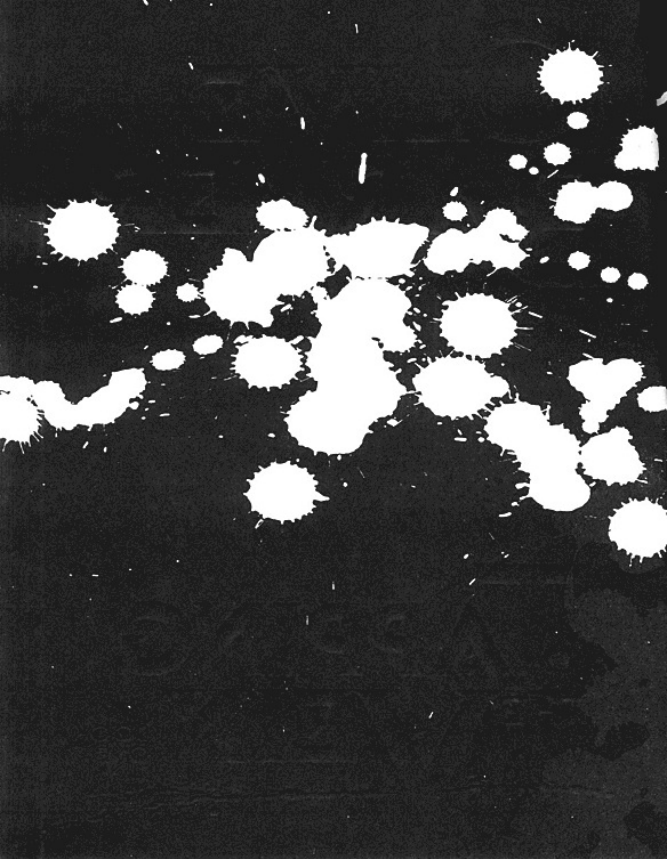
"BARKER IS THE HIGHLY TOUTED STEPHEN KING OF THE FUTURE
AND HE LIVES UP TO HIS BILLING" —THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

CLIVE BARKER

TAPPING THE VEIN

BOOK
ONE

DALTON © 1988



TAPPING THE VEIN

CLIVE
BARKER

TITAN  BOOKS

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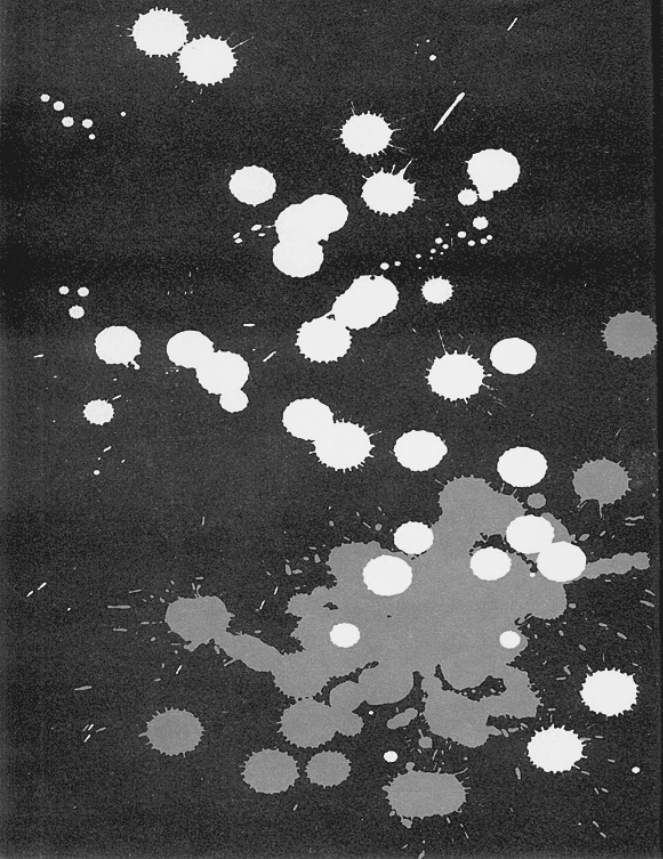
HUMAN REMAINS

Adapted and Illustrated by
P. Craig Russell
Lettered by Bill Pearson



PIG BLOOD BLUES

Illustrated by Scott Hampton
Adapted by Chuck Wagner
and Fred Burke
Lettered by Tracy Hampton



SOME TRADES ARE BEST PRACTICED BY DAYLIGHT, SOME BY NIGHT. GAVIN WAS A PROFESSIONAL IN THE LATTER CATEGORY. IN MIDWINTER, IN MIDSUMMER, LEANING AGAINST A WALL OR POISED IN A POORWAY, A FIREFLY CIGARETTE HOVERING AT HIS LIPS, HE SOLD WHAT SWEATED IN HIS JEANS TO ALL COMERS.

SOMETIMES TO VISITING WIDOWS WITH MORE MONEY THAN LOVE...

SOMETIMES TO LOST HUSBANDS HUNGRY FOR THEIR OWN SEX...

GAVIN DIDN'T MUCH CARE WHICH IT WAS. INDIFFERENCE WAS A TRADEMARK OF HIS, EVEN A PART OF HIS ATTRACTION. SIMPLER TO SAY "CIAO" OR "BE SEEING YOU" OR NOTHING AT ALL TO A FACE THAT SCARCELY CARED IF YOU LIVED OR DIED.

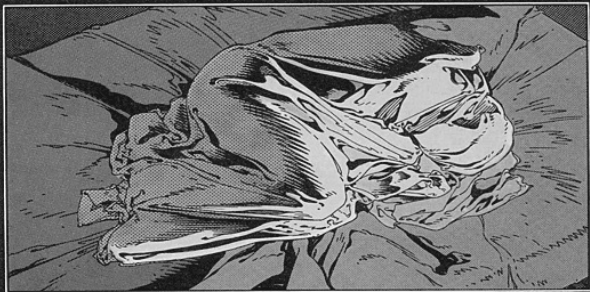
ONE OF THESE DAYS, HE KNEW IT. HE'D MARRY ONE OF THE WIDOWS: MAYBE THE WIDOW FROM FLORIDA. SHE'D TOLD HIM HOW SHE COULD PICTURE HIM SPREAD OUT BESIDE HER POOL IN FORT LAUDERDALE.

PERHAPS HE HADN'T GOT THERE YET, BUT HE'D TURN THE TRICK OF IT SOONER OR LATER.

THIS YEAR, OR YES, THIS YEAR FOR CERTAIN, IT HAD TO BE THIS YEAR. SOMETHING GOOD WAS COMING WITH THE AUTUMN, HE KNEW IT FOR SURE.

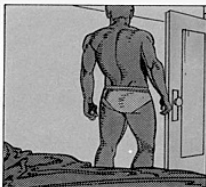
MEANWHILE HE WATCHED THE LINES DEEPEN AROUND HIS WONDERFUL MOUTH (IT WAS, WITHOUT DOUBT, WONDERFUL) AND CALCULATED THE ODDS AGAINST HIM IN THE RACE BETWEEN TIME AND OPPORTUNITY.

HUMAN REMAINS



ADAPTED FOR COMICS BY P. CRAIG RUSSELL

BY DAY HE SLEPT, MOSTLY, HOLLOWING OUT A WARM FURROW IN THE BED AND MUMMIFYING HIMSELF IN HIS SHEETS. ABOUT THREE OR SO HE'D GET UP, SHAVE AND SHOWER, THEN SPEND HALF AN HOUR IN FRONT OF THE MIRROR, INSPECTING HIMSELF...



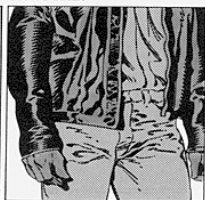
HE WAS WONDERFUL... PEOPLE TOLD HIM THAT ALL THE TIME. WONDERFUL. THE FACE, ON THE FACE, THEY WOULD SAY, HOLDING HIM TIGHT AS IF THEY COULD STEAL A PIECE OF HIS GLAMOUR.



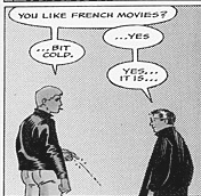
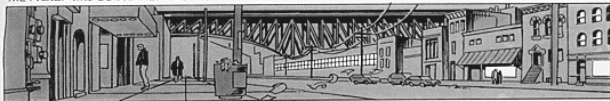
MOST OF THE HUSTLERS GAVIN KNEW HAD FACES THAT SEEMED, BESIDE HIS, UNMADE. FACES THAT LOOKED LIKE THE FIRST WORKINGS OF A SCULPTOR RATHER THAN THE FINISHED ARTICLE, WHEREAS HE WAS MADE, ENTIRE.

ALL THAT COULD BE DONE HAD BEEN! IT WAS JUST A QUESTION OF PRESERVING THE PERFECTION.

INSPECTION OVER, GAVIN WOULD DRESS, MAYBE REGARD HIMSELF FOR ANOTHER FIVE MINUTES, THEN TAKE THE PACKAGED WARES OUT TO SELL.



THE PICKUP WAS SO DAMNED EASY...



GAVIN KNEW NOTHING ABOUT ART AND EVEN LESS ABOUT HISTORY.

HE COULDN'T SEE WHY ANYONE WOULD WANT TO LOOK AT SUCH BROKEN THINGS; WHAT WAS THE FASCINATION?

HE STIFLED A YAWN, THE HEAT, THE EXHIBITS AND THE THOUGHT OF SEX MADE HIM LETHARGIC...

ONLY ONE OF THE EXHIBITS STRUCK HIM AS INTERESTING...



IT'S ROMAN... A TOMBSTONE...

HIS NAME WAS FLAVIUS. HE WAS A REGIMENTAL STANDARD-BEARER.

YOU AN ARCHAEOLOGIST THEN?

THAT'S PART OF MY BUSINESS. I RESEARCH SITES, OCCASIONALLY OVERSEE DIGS; BUT MOST OF THE TIME I RESTORE ARTIFACTS. OF COURSE, ALL THE BEST FINDS ARE CLAIMED BY THE MAJOR COLLECTIONS. BUT IF ONE IS CANNY, ONE MANAGES TO KEEP A FEW PIECES BACK.

ROMAN BRITAIN'S MY PERSONAL OBSESSION. THEY WERE AN INCREDIBLE INFLUENCE. THE ROMANS, CIVIL ENGINEERS, ROADLAYERS, BRIDGE BUILDERS...



OH, HELLO.

REYNOLDS IS LECTURING AGAIN. SORRY, I GET CARRIED AWAY.

CAN I GET YOU A DRINK?

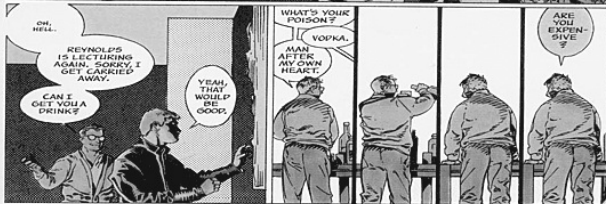
YEAH, THAT WOULD BE GOOD.

WHAT'S YOUR POISON?

VODKA.

MAN AFTER MY OWN HEART.

ARE YOU EXPENSIVE?



GAVIN HESITATED. THE MAN'S NERVOUSNESS WAS CATCHING, AND THE SUDDEN TILT OF THE CONVERSATION FROM THE ROMANS TO THE PRICE OF A BLOWJOB TOOK SOME ADJUSTMENT.



THE DRINKS CAME FAST AFTER THAT, AND GAVIN BEGAN TO FEEL BELLOWY THAN HE'D FELT IN A HELL OF A LONG TIME.

LATER THERE'D BE SOME DRINK-SLURRED SEX IN A PARKINED ROOM AND THAT WOULD BE THAT.

SO WHY NOT DRINK THE PUNTER'S VODKA AND ENJOY THE EXPERIENCE FOR WHAT IT OFFERED?



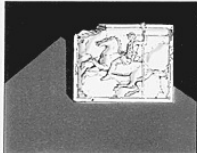
FROM SOMEWHERE ELSE IN THE FLAT, A RHYTHMICAL THUMPING THAT SPEEDED UP AND SLOWED AND SPEEDED UP AGAIN.



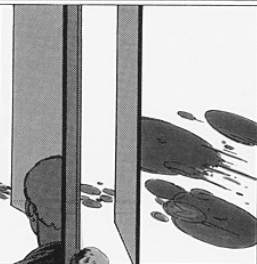
THERE WAS SOMETHING SATISFYING ABOUT THE IDEA OF HAVING YOUR LIKENESS, HOWEVER CRUDE, CARVED IN STONE AND PUT UP ON THE SPOT WHERE YOUR BONES LAY.

GAVIN'S FATHER HAD INSISTED ON BURIAL RATHER THAN CREMATION! HOW ELSE, HE'D ALWAYS SAID, WAS HE GOING TO BE REMEMBERED? WHO'D EVER GO TO AN URN, IN A WALL, AND CRY?

THE IRONY WAS THAT NOBODY EVER WENT TO HIS GRAVE, EITHER...



SUDDENLY THE NOISE AGAIN, MORE FRENZIED THAN EVER. SOMEbody, SOMEWHERE, WAS VERY ANGRY, AND THIS TIME THERE COULD BE NO SELF-DECEPTION: THE DRUMMER WAS HERE, ON THIS FLOOR, A FEW YARDS AWAY,



YOU'RE HURT.

JESUS' SAKE, GO AWAY, QUICKLY. I'VE CHANGED MY MIND...

I'LL FETCH THE POLICE.

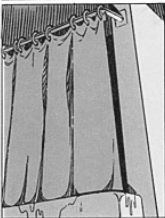
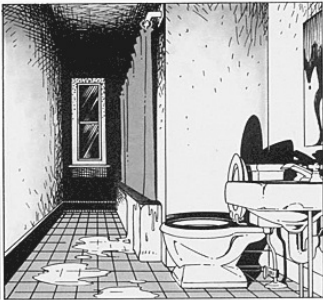
GET THE FUCKING HELL OUT OF HERE, WILL YOU! FUCKING BUMBOY!!



GAVIN STOOD UP, TRYING TO MAKE SENSE OUT OF ALL THIS. THE GUY WAS IN PAIN. THE FIRST THING WAS TO LOCATE THE BATHROOM. HOPEFULLY THERE HE'D FIND A BANDAGE FOR REYNOLDS.



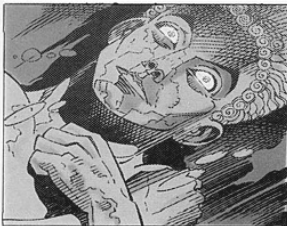
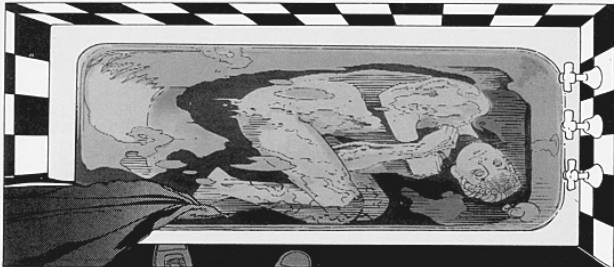
GAVIN TURNED THE CORNER AND DEAD AHEAD THE DOOR WAS AHEAD. A LIGHT BURNED INSIDE. WATER SHOWN ON TILES. THE BATHROOM. IF THE ATTACKER WAS STILL IN THE FLAT, HE MUST BE HERE. THERE WAS NOWHERE ELSE FOR HIM TO HIDE.



GAVIN PEERED IN. A BROWN SCUM SPIRALLED ON THE SURFACE AND THE SMELL OF IT WAS FAINTLY ANIMAL, LIKE THE WET FUR OF A DOG.



HE PASSED HIS HAND OVER THE SURFACE TO CLEAR AWAY THE MUCK. HIS REFLECTION SHATTERED, AND THE OCCUPANT OF THE BATH CAME CLEAR. IT WAS A STATUE, AND IT WAS NAKED. ITS ANATOMY NO BETTER REALIZED THAN ITS FEATURES: THE WORK OF AN APPRENTICE SCULPTOR...



THERE WAS NOTHING TO BE FRIGHTENED OF HERE...



FORGET YOU EVER SAW IT.



ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? YOU DON'T LOOK IT.

I SLIPPED. WATER ON THE FLOOR.



BUT THE NOISE...

NEIGH-BORS... THAT'S ALL.



WHAT IS THIS? WHY IS IT ALL CURLED UP LIKE THAT?

IS HE DYING?



THIS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH YOU.



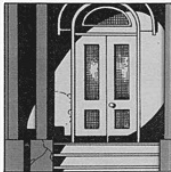
YOU STOLE IT... IS THAT RIGHT?



HE CLOSED THE FRONT DOOR BEHIND HIM, SUDDENLY AWARE THAT HIS TOOTH WAS ACHING, AND AS HE DID SO, THE NOISE BEGAN AGAIN...

THE BEATING OF A FIST AGAINST A WALL...

OR WORSE, THE SUDDEN FURY OF A WOKEN HEART.



THE TOOTHACHE WAS REALLY BITING THE FOLLOWING DAY, AND HE WENT TO THE DENTIST MIDMORNING, EXPECTING TO CHARM THE GIRL ON THE DESK INTO GIVING HIM AN INSTANT APPOINTMENT...



HE TOLD HER IT WAS AN EMERGENCY: SHE TOLD HIM IT WASN'T. IT WAS GOING TO BE A BAD DAY: AN ACHING TOOTH AND A LESBIAN DENTIST RECEPTIONIST.

THAT WAS THE DAY THE PURSUIT BEGAN...

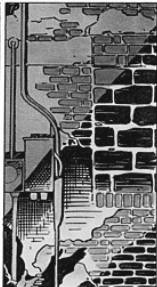


GAVIN HAD BEEN CHASED BY ADMIRERS BEFORE, BUT NEVER QUITE LIKE THIS. NEVER SO SUBTLE, SO SURREPTITIOUS.

HE'D HAD PEOPLE FOLLOW HIM AROUND FOR DAYS FROM BAR TO BAR, FROM STREET TO STREET, SO DOGLIKE IT ALMOST DROVE HIM MAD.

BUT THIS PURSUIT WAS NOWHERE NEAR AS OBVIOUS; IT WAS SCARCELY MORE THAN A FEELING...

JUST A FRICKLY SENSE, EVERY TIME HE GLANCED AROUND, THAT SOMEONE WAS SLOTTING THEMSELVES INTO THE SHADOWS.

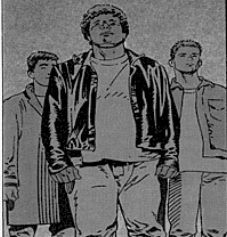


IT WAS A BAD, BAD FEELING; AND THERE WAS MORE WHERE THAT CAME FROM...



PRETORIUS, A GLORIFIED PIMP SOME-
WHERE BETWEEN FORTY-FIVE AND ASSAS-
SINATION, HED BEEN RUINING A CIRCLE
OF WOMEN AND THREE OR FOUR BOYS...

WHITE BOY... I
HEAR BAD THINGS ABOUT
YOU. YOU PUT SOME OF MY
PRIME BOY MEAT OUT OF
COMMISSION. YOU DID HIM
SOME REAL SERIOUS
MISCHIEF.



NOT
ME,
YOU'VE
GOT
THE
WRONG
MAN.



HE RECOGNIZED YOU,
TRASH. WE'RE NOT TALKING
A COUPLE OF BRUISES HERE,
MAN...

I'M TALKING
ABOUT TAKING A SHOWER
IN THE KID'S BLOOD. THAT'S
WHAT I'M SAYING. HANGING HIM
UP AND CUTTING HIM EVERY-
WHERE, THEN LEAVING HIM ON
MY STAIR WEARING A PAIR
OF FUCKING SOCKS...



YOU GETTING MY
MESSAGE NOW,
WHITE BOY? WHEN YOU HURT
ONE OF MY KIDS,
I BLEED TOO.

YOU
READ MY
MESSAGE?



GAVIN FELT ICED LEAD IN HIS BELLY. JESUS, THEY WERE GOING TO HURT HIM. THAT WAS PRETORIUS' FAVORITE
PASTIME, OR SO THE STREET TALK WENT: THE SPOILING OF BEAUTY. HE COULD AIM BEYOND REDEMPTION
IN THREE STROKES OF HIS RAZOR, AND HAVE THE VICTIM POCKET HIS KIPS AS A KEEPSAKE.



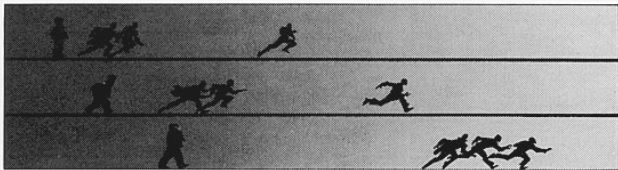
IF I'D
DONE THIS
LIKE YOU SAY,
YOU THINK
I'D BE
WALKING
THE
STREET?

THE KID KNEW
YOU, EVEN WITH A
STOCKING OVER YOUR
HEAD HE KNEW YOU.
THE VOICE WAS THE
SAME. FACE IT, YOU
WERE RECOGNIZED...

NOW TAKE THE
CONSEQUENCES.



FUCK
YOU!



THE MAN
DIDN'T TELL YOU
TO LEAVE.



ALLOW ME TO
REARRANGE YOUR FACE
FOR YOU. A LITTLE
CRIME OF FASHION.



PRETORIUS PRESSED THE POINT OF
THE BLADE AGAINST GAVIN'S CHIN
AND BEGAN THE CUT WITHOUT
FURTHER DEBATE. GAVIN HOWLED AS
BLOOD WASHED DOWN HIS NECK.

HIS PULSE BEGAN TO THUD IN HIS TEMPLES, AND WINDOWS, ONE BEHIND THE OTHER, OPENED AND OPENED IN FRONT OF HIM, AND HE WAS FALLING THROUGH THEM INTO UNCONSCIOUSNESS. BETTER TO DIE. BETTER TO DIE. THEY'D DESTROY HIS FACE! BETTER TO DIE.



THEN HE WAS SCREAMING
AGAIN, EXCEPT THAT HE WASN'T
AWARE OF MAKING THE SOUND
IN HIS THROAT. THEN HE REALIZED
IT WAS PRETORIUS' SCREAM HE
WAS HEARING, NOT HIS OWN.

A PERSON, OR PERSONS
UNKNOWN, HAD STEPPED
IN AND PREVENTED THE
COMPLETION OF HIS
SPYLING.





IT TOOK HIM ONLY A MOMENT TO PLACE THOSE CRUDE FEATURES. IT WAS REYNOLDS' STATUE. THERE WAS, HOWEVER, SOME IMPROVEMENT IN ITS APPEARANCE. THE FACE WAS ALTOGETHER BETTER PROPORTIONED. IT REMAINED A FAINTED DOLL, BUT IT WAS A DOLL WITH ASPIRATIONS.



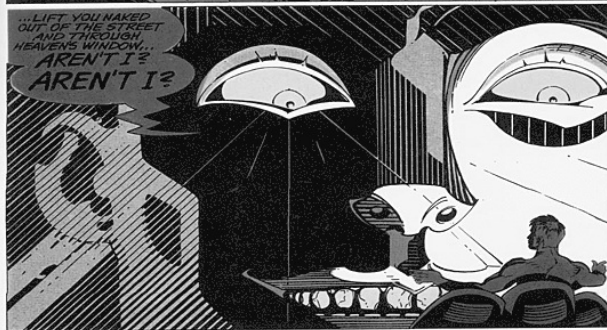
THE VISION REACHED OUT AND TOUCHED GAVIN'S JAW, LIGHTLY RUNNING ITS CRUDELY CARVED FINGERS ALONG THE LIPS OF THE WOUND PREETORIUS HAD MADE. A KING ON ITS SMALLEST FINGER CAUGHT THE LIGHT! A RING IDENTICAL TO HIS OWN.



IT TRANSFERRED ITS TOUCH FROM GAVIN'S JAWBONE TO ITS OWN, AND IT GREW A SCAR ON THE SPOT, NO BLOOD WELLED UP! IT HAD NO BLOOD.



THE SNEER ABSURDITY OF THIS SITUATION WELLED UP IN GAVIN. WAS IT REALLY ANY LOSS THAT FREETORIUS WAS DEAD OR THAT SOME DRUNKEN COCKSUCKING KID HAD GIVEN UP SOME BLOOD AND SLEEP BECAUSE THIS PAINTED MIRACLE NEEDED TO FEED ITS GROWTH? THERE WERE WORSE THINGS THAN THIS EVERYDAY, SOMEWHERE; HUGE HORRORS...



HOW DID IT KNOW THE DREAMS OF HIS CHILDHOOD? HOW COULD IT HAVE GUESSED THAT PARTICULAR EMBLEM OF BEING HOISTED OUT OF A STREET FULL OF PLAGUE INTO A HOUSE THAT WAS HEAVEN?

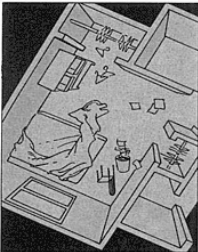


TWO HOURS LATER, AND MILES AWAY, HE TOOK TIME TO CHECK HIS POCKETS. ALMOST A HUNDRED POUNDS IN CASH, A SMALL COLLECTION OF PHOTOGRAPHS, SOME OF HIS PARENTS, MOSTLY OF HIMSELF; A WATCH, A RING, AND A GOLD CHAIN.

IN HIS HEAD, THE INESCAPABLE KNOWLEDGE THAT HE WOULD BE FOUND OUT SOONER OR LATER. SOMEBODY WOULD SURELY HAVE SEEKED HIM WITH PRESTIDITISTS, AND SPILL THE BEANS TO THE POLICE.



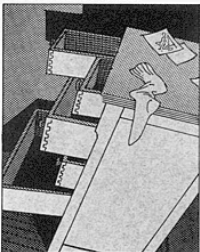
HE'D SEEN HOW THOROUGH-GOING THESE BASTARDS COULD BE, NOW COMPLETELY THEY COULD SEIZE AND MARGEL UP A MAN'S IDENTITY. THEY COULD ERASE YOU AS SURELY AS A SHOT, BUT LEAVE YOU A LIVING BLANK.



HIS LIFE WAS THEIRS NOW TO SNEER AT AND SALIVATE OVER! EVEN HAVE A NERVOUS MOMENT, ONE OR TWO OF THEM, WHEN THEY SAW HIS PHOTOGRAPHS AND WONDERED IF PERHAPS THEY'D PAID FOR THIS BOY THEMSELVES, SOME HORNY NIGHT.



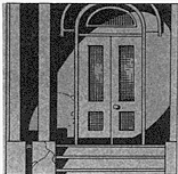
LET THEM HAVE IT ALL. THEY WERE WELCOME. FROM NOW ON HE WOULD BE LAWLESS, BECAUSE LAWS PROTECT POSSESSIONS, AND HE HAD NONE. HE HAD NO PLACE TO LIVE, NOR ANYTHING TO CALL HIS OWN. HE DIDN'T EVEN HAVE FEAR: THAT WAS THE STRANGEST THING.



THERE WAS NOTHING TO BE DONE AND HE FELT SOMETHING AKIN TO RELIEF, HAPPY THAT HIS LIFE HAD BEEN STOLEN FROM HIM IN ITS SQUALID ENTIRETY. HE WAS THE LIGHTER FOR IT.

THE BEST THING MIGHT BE TO PAWN THE RING AND THE CHAIN, THEN HITCH NORTH.

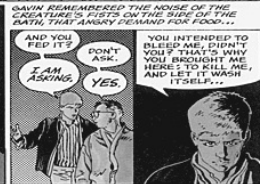
BUT FIRST... REYNOLDS.

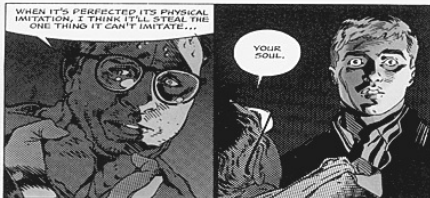




GAVIN PRESSED THE DOOR AND REYNOLDS WAS EITHER TOO WEAK OR TOO BEFUDDLED TO STOP HIM...







THE OLD MAN TOOK THE BEATING IN ABSOLUTE SILENCE, TURNING HIS FACE UP FROM ONE BLOW TO RECEIVE ANOTHER, BRUSHING THE BLOOD OUT OF HIS SWELLING EYES, ONLY TO HAVE THEM FILL AGAIN.

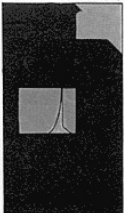


GAVIN LEFT REYNOLDS IN THE RUINS OF ROME AND WENT INTO THE STREET. THE ONLY THING HE COULD DO NOW WAS FIND THIS BEAST THAT HAD HIS BEAUTY AND BEST IT.

IF HE FAILED, HE FAILED ATTEMPTING TO SECURE HIS ONLY CERTAIN ATTRIBUTE: A FACE THAT WAS WONDERFUL.

TALK OF SOULS AND HUMANITY WAS FOR HIM SO MUCH WASTED AIR...

HE WANTED HIS FACE.



REYNOLDS, OUT OF SIGHT, LET THE CURTAIN DROP AND PICKED UP THE SHORT STABBING SWORD...

HE CROSSED TO THE WALL, STEADIED THE HILT AGAINST IT, AND LET HIS OWN BODY WEIGHT IMPALE HIM.

THOUGH HE TRIED TO ARRANGE TO TURN, AND SO DRIVE THE BLADE ALL THE WAY HOME AS HE FELL ON IT, HE FLIPPED THE GESTURE AND INSTEAD FELL ON HIS SIDE.

THE IMPACT MADE HIM AWARE OF THE SWORD IN HIS BODY, A STIFF UNCHARITABLE PRESENCE TRANSFIXING HIM UTTERLY.



IT TOOK HIM WELL OVER TEN MINUTES TO PIECE OUT IN THAT TIME, PAIN APART, HE WAS CONTENT. WHATEVER THE FLAWS OF HIS FIFTY-SEVEN YEARS, AND THEY WERE MANY, HE FELT HE WAS PERISHING IN A WAY HIS BELOVED FLAVIUS WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ASHAMED OF.



TOWARD THE END IT BEGAN TO RAIN, AND THE NOISE ON THE ROOF MADE HIM BELIEVE GOD WAS BURYING THE HOUSE, SEALING HIM UP FOREVER...

AND AS THE MOMENT CAME, SO DID A SPLENDID DELUSION: A HAND CARRYING A LIGHT AND ESCORTED BY VOICES, SEEMED TO BREAK THROUGH THE WALL. GHOSTS OF THE FUTURE CAME TO EXCAVATE HIS HISTORY...

HE SMILED TO GREET THEM AND WAS ABOUT TO ASK THEM WHAT YEAR THIS WAS WHEN HE REALIZED HE WAS DEAD.



THE CREATURE WAS FAR BETTER
AT AVOIDING GAVIN THAN HE'D
BEEN AT AVOIDING IT.



THREE DAYS PASSED WITHOUT ITS
PURSUER SNATCHING SIGHT OF HIDE
NOR HAIR OF IT. BUT THE FACT OF
ITS PRESENCE, CLOSE, BUT NEVER
TOO CLOSE, WAS INDISPUTABLE.



IN A BAR SOMEONE WOULD SAY: "SAW
YOU LAST NIGHT ON THE EDGWARE
ROAD?" WHEN HE'D NOT BEEN NEAR THE
PLACE, OR "HOW'D YOU MAKE OUT WITH
THAT ARAB THEN?" OR "DON'T YOU
SPEAK TO YOUR FRIENDS ANY LONGER?"
AND GOD, HE SOON GOT TO LIKE THE
FEELING, SO WHAT IF HIS LIFE HAD
BEEN TAKEN FROM HIM AND WAS BEING
WORN TO ITS LENGTH AND BREADTH
IN LIEU OF HIM? HE COULD SLEEP
AND KNOW THAT HE WAS AWAKE IN
THE NIGHT AND BEING ADORÉD.



HE BEGAN TO SEE THE CREATURE
NOT AS A MONSTER TERRORIZING
HIM, BUT AS HIS TOOL, HIS PUBLIC
PERSONA ALMOST...



IT WAS SUBSTANCE : HE SHADOW.



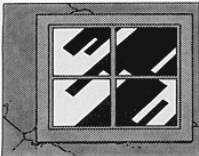
IT WAS OVER A WEEK SINCE HE'D LEFT REYNOLDS TO THE RUINS OF ROME, AND IN THAT TIME HE'D ONLY VENTURED OUT FROM HIS NEW DIGS THREE TIMES. SLEEP WAS MORE IMPORTANT NOW THAN FOOD OR EXERCISE.



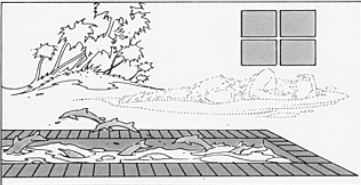
HE'D GROWN TO LIKE THE STALENESS OF THE AIR, THE SENSE OF A WORLD ELSEWHERE WHICH HE HAD NO PART OF OR PLACE IN.

MAYBE LATER, WHEN THE BARS WERE EMPTYING AND HE WOULDN'T BE NOTICED, HE'D SLIP OUT OF HIS COCON AND SEE WHAT COULD BE SEEN.

FOR NOW, THERE WERE DREAMS.



HE DREAMT WATER: A POOL IN FORT LAUPERDALE, A POOL FULL OF FISH.



THE SPLASH OF THEIR LEAPS AND DIVES WAS CONTINUING; AN OVERFLOW FROM SLEEP.

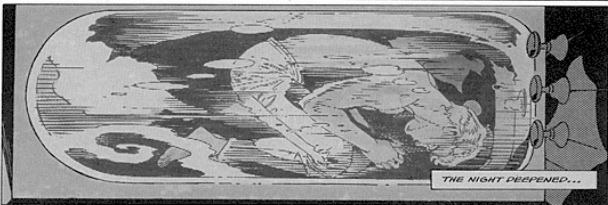
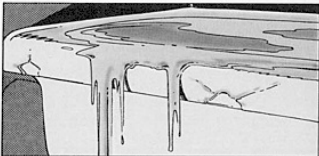


NOW AWAKE, THE SOUND CONTINUED...

IT WAS COMING FROM THE BATHROOM, NO LONGER RUNNING BUT LAPPING. HE KNEW VERY WELL WHO IT MUST BE. KEEN FOR REUNION, HE SLID OUT FROM HIS SKIN OF SHEET.



IN FRONT OF HIM THE BATH WAS ALMOST FILLED TO OVERFLOWING. THE WATER WAS OIL-SLICK CALM AND DARK. AS BEFORE, NOTHING BROKE SURFACE. IT WAS LYING DEEP, HIDDEN.



THE NIGHT DEEPENED...

IT HAD TRACED HIM HERE — IT WASN'T LIKELY TO RUN AWAY AGAIN. HE COULD GO BACK TO BED.



GAVIN,
ARE YOU
AWAKE?

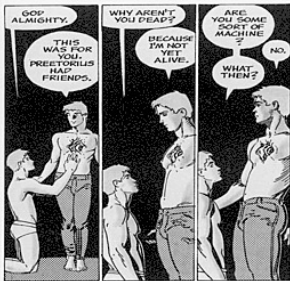


YES!

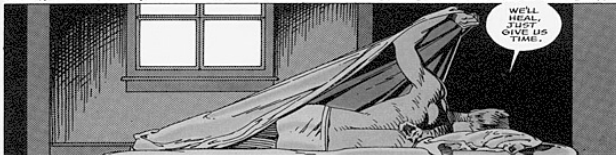


WILL
YOU
HELP
ME?





IT BEGAN TO WALK TOWARD HIM AND GAVIN COULD SEE MORE CLEARLY THE FLUTTERING IN ITS CHEST CAVITY, THE RESTLESS, INCOHERENT FORMS THAT WERE MUSHROOMING THERE IN PLACE OF THE HEART.



GAVIN WENT TO THE DOOR OF THE FLAT AND BOLTED IT. THEY WOULD STAY HERE TOGETHER IN SAFETY. HE AND IT, HE AND HIMSELF.

AS HE CROSSED THE ROOM HE CAUGHT SIGHT OF HIMSELF IN THE MIRROR. A FREEZE FRAME FROM AN ATROCITY FILM. A WISP OF A MAN, SHRUNK BY THE COLD AND LIT BY A RAINWATER LIGHT. HIS REFLECTION ALMOST FLICKERED; HE WAS SO INSUBSTANTIAL.



THERE WAS NOTHING TO DO BUT WATCH IT SLEEP, AND HE BECAME BORED WITH THAT. BUT BEFORE LONG HE'D WANT TO LOOK AGAIN AND HE'D BE BACK STARING AT THE CASUAL BEAUTY OF HIS OUTSTRETCHED ARM, THE LIGHT FLICKING THE WRISTBONE, THE LASHES.



HE'D SURFACE FROM SLEEP EVERY FEW MINUTES... THE CREATURE WAS UP! IT WAS STANDING BY THE WINDOW, NOW IN FRONT OF THE MIRROR, NOW IN THE KITCHEN. IT DRESSED IN HIS CLOTHES; HE MURMURED HIS ASSENT TO THE THEFT IN HIS SLEEP.



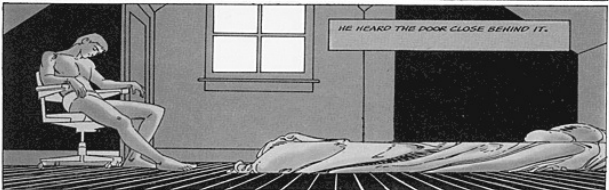
IT STOOD OVER HIM, ITS CHEST WHOLE, AND HE WAS REASSURED BY ITS PRESENCE.



IT WAS WHISTLING, BUT HE WAS TOO DOZY TO STIR JUST YET, AND QUITE CONTENT TO HAVE THE WHISTLING YOUNG MAN IN HIS CLOTHES LIVE FOR HIM.



AT LAST IT LEANED OVER THE CHAIR AND KISSED HIM ON THE LIPS, A BROTHER'S KISS, AND LEFT.



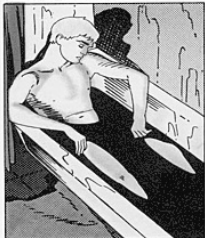
AFTER THAT THERE WERE DAYS, HE WASN'T SURE HOW MANY, WHEN HE STAYED IN THE ROOM AND DID NOTHING BUT DRINK WATER, DRINKING AND SLEEPING, TWIN MOONS. THE BED HE SLEPT ON WAS DAMP FROM WHERE THE CREATURE HAD LAID, BUT HE ENJOYED THE WET LINEN, WHICH HIS BODY DRIED OUT TOO SOON...



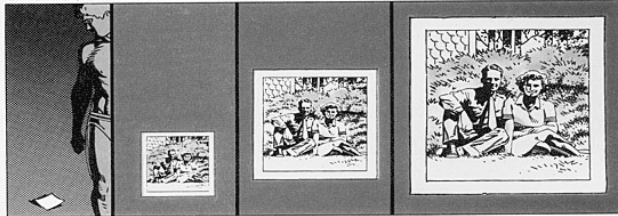
WHEN IT DID HE TOOK A BATH HIMSELF IN THE WATER THE THING HAD LAIN IN, AND RETURNED TO THE BED DRIPPING WET. HIS SKIN CRAWLING WITH COLD AND THE SCENT OF MILDEW ALL AROUND.

LATER, TOO INDIFFERENT TO MOVE, HE ALLOWED HIS BLADDER FREE-REIN, AND THAT WATER IN TIME BECAME COLD UNTIL HE DRIED IT WITH HIS DWINDLING BODY HEAT.

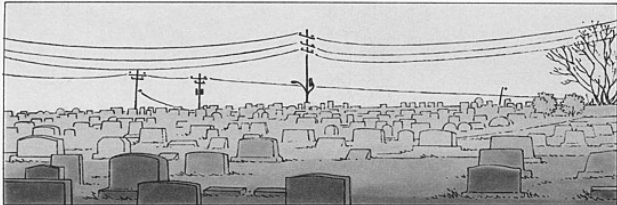
BUT FOR SOME REASON, DESPITE THE ICY ROOM, HIS NAKEDNESS, HIS HUNGER, HE COULDN'T DIE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT OF THE SIXTH DAY, HE SAT ON THE EDGE OF THE BED TO FIND THE FLAW IN HIS RESOLVE.



EVENTUALLY, BY CHANCE, HE FOUND A PICTURE OF HIS PARENTS HE REMEMBERED THE CREATURE STARING AT. THAT WAS THE BAR TO HIS SUICIDE: THAT PICTURE. THERE WERE RESPECTS TO BE PAID. UNTIL THEN, HOW COULD HE HOPE TO DIE?



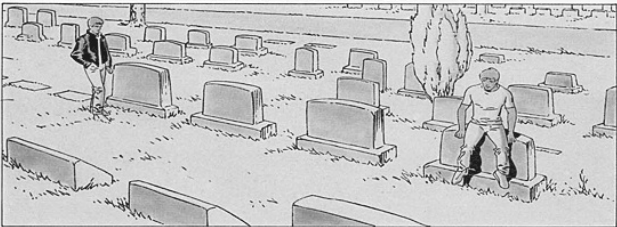
HE WALKED TO THE CEMETARY THROUGH THE SLUSH WEARING ONLY A PAIR OF SLACKS AND A TEE-SHIRT. THE REMARKS OF MIDDLE-AGED WOMEN AND SCHOOL CHILDREN WENT UNHEARD. WHOSE BUSINESS BUT HIS OWN WAS IT IF GOING BAREFOOT WAS THE DEATH OF HIM?



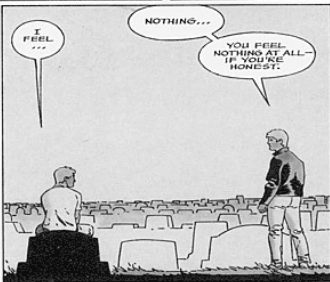
STARING AT THE STONE, WORDS CAME SPILLING OUT, AS THOUGH FATHER WAS SITTING ON THE EDGE OF THE GRAVE, DANGLING HIS FEET, PRETENDING, AS HE ALWAYS PRETENDED, TO CARE.



A TOY TRAIN LET OUT A LONG BLAST ON ITS HORN AS IT PASSED, AND GAVIN LOOKED UP AND THERE HE WAS—HIMSELF—STANDING ABSOLUTELY STILL A FEW YARDS AWAY.



HIS CLOTHES LOOKED CREASED AND SHabby FROM CONSTANT WEAR, BUT THE FLESH! O THE FLESH WAS MORE RADIANT THAN HIS HAD EVER BEEN. IT ALMOST SHONE IN THE DRIZZLING LIGHT, AND THE TEARS ON THE POPPELGANGER'S CHEEKS ONLY MADE THE FEATURES MORE EXQUISITE.

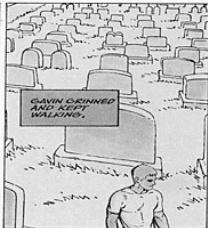




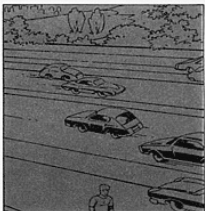
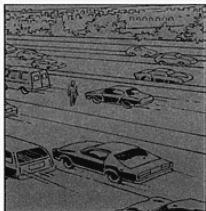
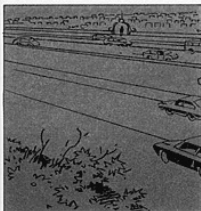
IT WAS SURELY PLAYACTING, BUT IF SO, WHY WAS THERE SUCH GRIEF IN ITS EYES, AND WHY WERE ITS FEATURES CRUMPLED INTO UGLINESS AS IT WEPT. GAVIN HAD SELDOM GIVEN IN TO TEARS: THEY'D ALWAYS MADE HIM FEEL WEAK AND RIDICULOUS. BUT THIS THING WAS PROUD OF ITS TEARS, IT GLORIED IN THEM, THEY WERE ITS TRIUMPH.



GAVIN SHRUGGED. WHAT DID HE KNOW OR CARE ABOUT THE FINE ART OF BEING HUMAN? HE DIDN'T EVEN LOOK AT THE EFFIGY AGAIN, JUST TURNED AND STARTED DOWN THE PATH THAT RAN BESIDE THE CHURCH.



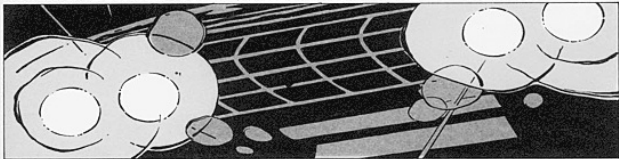
IT WAS ALMOST THE COMMUTER HOUR, THE ARTERIAL ROAD THAT RAN BY THE CHURCH WAS ALREADY THICK WITH SPEEDING TRAFFIC. GAVIN STEPPED INTO THE MIDDLE OF THE FLOW WITHOUT LOOKING TO RIGHT OR LEFT, IGNORING THE SCREAMS OF BRAKES AND THE CURSES, AND BEGAN TO WALK AMONGST THE TRAFFIC AS IF HE WERE IDLING IN AN OPEN FIELD.

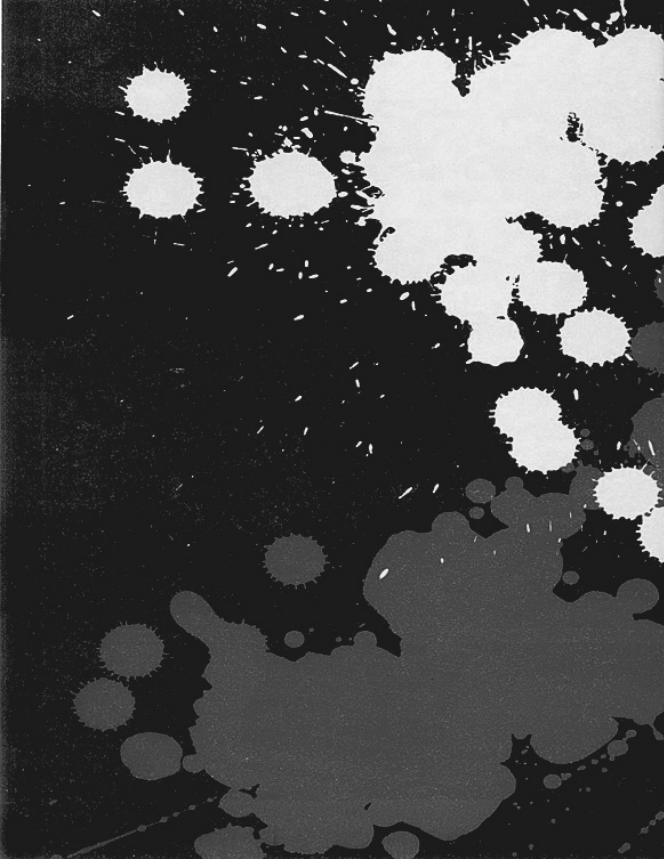


IF THE CIRCUMSTANCES WERE RIGHT, MAYBE ONE OF THEM WOULD PANIC, SWERVE, AND RUN HIM DOWN...

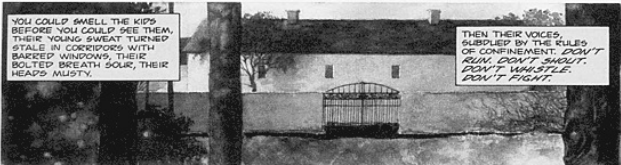


FROM NOW ON HE BELONGED TO CHANCE, WHOSE STANDARD-BEARER HE WOULD SURELY BE.









YOU COULD SMELL THE KIDS BEFORE YOU COULD SEE THEM, THEIR YOUNG SWEAT TURNED STALE IN CORRIDORS WITH BARRED WINDOWS, THEIR BOLTED BREATH SOUR, THEIR HEADS MUSTY.

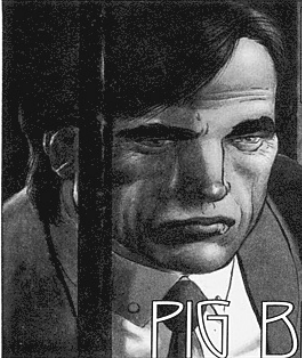
THEN THEIR VOICES, SUBDUED BY THE RULES OF CONFINEMENT. *DON'T RUN. DON'T SHOUT. DON'T WHISTLE. DON'T FIGHT.*



THEY CALLED IT A REMAND CENTER FOR ADOLESCENT OFFENDERS, BUT IT WAS NEAR AS DAMN IT A PRISON. THERE WERE LOCKS AND KEYS AND WARDERS.



THE GESTURES OF LIBERALISM WERE FEW AND FAR BETWEEN AND THEY DIDN'T DISGUISE THE TRUTH TOO WELL; TETHERPLOWNE WAS A PRISON BY SWEETER NAME, AND THE INMATES KNEW IT.



NOT THAT REDMAN HAD ANY ILLUSIONS ABOUT HIS PUPILS-TO-BE. THEY WEREN'T MISUNDERSTOOD MORONS, THEY WERE QUICK AND SHARP AND AMORAL, LIKE THE RAZORS THEY HID UNDER THEIR TONGUES. THEY HAD NO USE FOR SENTIMENT, THEY JUST WANTED OUT.



WELCOME TO TETHERPLOWNE

RIG BLOOD BLUES

ILLUSTRATED BY SCOTT HAMPTON

WAS THE WOMAN'S
NAME LEVERTON,
OR LEVERFALL, OR--

I'M DOCTOR
LEVERTHAL.

LEVERTHAL. YES.
HARD-BITTEN BITCH
HE'D MET AT--

WE
MET AT
THE INTERVIEW.
WE'RE GLAD TO
SEE YOU, MR.
REDMAN.

THE JOKE
WELL AMONG
THEVES. SHE
DIDN'T EVEN
SEEM TO
FEAR IT.

YOU
HAVE A
SOLID BACK-
GROUND IN THE
POLICE FORCE. OUR
HOPE IS THAT YOUR
APPOINTMENT HERE
WILL BE WELCOMED
BY THE FINDING
AUTHORITIES.

SO THAT WAS IT.
TOKEN EX-POLICEMAN
BROUGHT IN TO APPEASE
THE POWERS THAT BE.

IT SEEMED
IMPORTANT. YOU
SEE SO MANY OF
THESE BOYS HAVE
REAL AGGRESSION
PROBLEMS. THEY CAN'T
CONTROL THEMSELVES
AND CONSEQUENTLY
THEY SUFFER.

BUT THEY
HAVE COMMITTED
CRIMINAL ACTS, AND
MUST, PRESUMABLY, BE
REMAINED OF
THE FACT.

I'D LIKE
TO KNOW WHAT
THE BOYS HAVE
BEEN TOLD.

BEEN
TOLD?

ABOUT
ME.

WELL,
SOMETHING
OF YOUR BACK-
GROUND.

I
SEE.

THEY'D BEEN WARNED.
HERE COME THE PIGS.

* I DON'T THINK THEY NEED
REMAINDING, MR. REDMAN.

* I THINK THEY BURN
WITH GUILT.*

THERE WAS A PURSUIT ON
THE PLAYING FIELD, PURSUIT,
AND NOW A CAPTURE.

* EXCUSE ME. I'LL
BE RIGHT BACK.*

LIKE HELL SHE WOULD JUDGING BY
THE WAY THE SCENE ON THE FIELD
WAS PROGRESSING, IT WOULD BE
A THREE CROWBAR JOB TO
PRIZE THEM APART.



REDMAN SPENT A GOOD DEAL OF THE NEXT DAY PUTTING HIS WORKSHOP IN ORDER.

ABOUT FOUR-THIRTY A BELL RANG. HE IGNORED IT, BUT AFTER A TIME HIS INSTINCTS GOT THE BETTER OF HIM. BELLS WERE ALARMS, AND ALARMS WERE SOUNDED TO ALERT PEOPLE.

KLANG

IT SOUNDED LIKE IT WAS COMING FROM WHAT WAS LAUGHINGLY CALLED THE HOSPITAL UNIT-- TWO OR THREE ROOMS CLOSED OFF FROM THE MAIN BLOCK.

THERE WAS NO SIGN OF SMOKE IN THE AIR, SO IT CLEARLY WASN'T A FIRE. THERE WAS SHOUTING, THOUGH. MORE THAN SHOUTING. A HOWL.

KLANG
KLANG

HOLD HIM!
CALM DOWN!

LEMME GO, YOU
FUCKIN'--

FUCKER!
FUCKER!

IT WAS LACEY,
UNWHOLESOME
LACEY.

O'KAY,
WE GOT
HIM.

LEMME GO!
OWWWW!

WHAT'S
GOING ON?

HE LOCKED
HIMSELF IN THE
LAVATORY, TRIED TO
GET OUT THROUGH
THE WINDOW.

WHY?

YOU
THE PIG?

BE QUIET,
LACEY, YOU'RE IN
ENOUGH TROUBLE
AS IT IS /

YES,
SON, I'M
THE PIG

YOU
DON'T KNOW
NOTHING.

ALL
RIGHT,
LACEY. THAT
ENOUGH.

LACEY
WHY?
YOU TRY TO
ESCAPE?

'CAUSE
HE CAME
BACK.

WHO?

HENESSEY.

THAT WAS ALL. THE
WARDER SHUNTED
HIM OUT OF SIGHT
BEFORE HE COULD
SAY ANYTHING MORE.



THE
BOY'S LYING.
HENESSEY'S
NO LONGER
WITH US.

HENESSEY?
WHO'S HENESSEY?



LACEY'S
CLEVER HE
KNOWS JUST THE
SPOT...

EH?



"YOU'RE NEW HERE, MR. RED-
MAN, AND LACEY WANTS TO
GIVE YOU THE IMPRESSION
HE'S GOT A MYSTERY ALL
HIS OWN."

HOSPITAL
UNIT

"IT ISN'T A MYSTERY THEN?"



"HENESSEY? GOOD GOD NO!
HE ESCAPED IN EARLY MAY HE
AND LACEY HAD... SOMETHING
BETWEEN THEM--GOD KNOWS
WHAT."

HOSPITAL
UNIT

"HOW DID
HENESSEY
ESCAPE?"



WUMP

HOSPITAL
UNIT

"WE STILL DON'T KNOW. THE
PLACE WAS SEARCHED FROM
TOP TO BOTTOM. BUT HE'D
GONE."

"AND LACEY?"



UNDER HENESSEY'S
THUMB, IT OFTEN HAPPENS.
YOUNGER BOY IDOLIZES AN
OLDER, MORE EXPERIENCED
INDIVIDUAL.

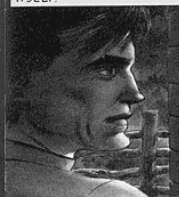
NEAT, THOUGHT REDMAN. SO NEAT HE
DIDN'T BELIEVE A WORD OF IT. MINDS
WEREN'T PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION.
THEY WERE SCRAWLS; THEY WERE
SPRAWLING SPLASHES OF GRAFFITI,
UNPREDICTABLE, UNCONFINABLE.

AND LITTLE BOY LACEY?
HE WAS WRITTEN ON WATER.

CLASSES BEGAN THE NEXT DAY. THE BOYS RESPONDED QUICKLY TO REDMAN'S STRAIGHT DEALING. THEY RECOGNIZED IN HIM A MAN THEY COULD RESPECT WITHOUT LIKING. THEY EXPECTED NO FAVORS, AND RECEIVED NONE. IT WAS A STABLE ARRANGEMENT.



REDMAN WAS ABOUT TO TURN AWAY WHEN THERE WAS A NOISE FROM INSIDE THE SECOND COMPARTMENT, AND A GREAT BULK RIGHTED ITSELF.



THAT'S THE STY, SIR. SEE IT?

YES I SEE IT.

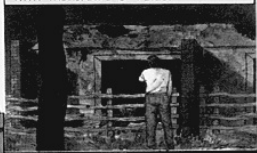
IT'S NOT REALLY A FARM, SIR--JUST A FEW HUTS. STINK, THEY DO, SIR. ESPECIALLY NOW.

I WOULDN'T GO DOWN THERE, SIR, IT'S HIGH AS A FUCKING KITE.



AS CREELEY HAD SAID, IT WASN'T REALLY A FARM AT ALL. IT WAS A TINY DOMESTICATED PACHAU, FILTHY AND FORLORN.

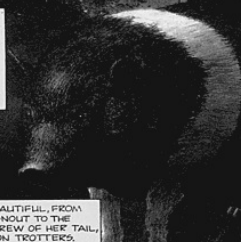
THE YOUNG PIGS LIVED IN A BED OF THEIR OWN ORDURE, ISLANDS OF PLUNG COOKED TO PERFECTION IN THE SUN, PEOPLED WITH THOUSANDS OF FLIES.



THE SOW WAS PRISTINE, HER DARK FRAME RADIANT WITH GOOD HEALTH, A GLAMOROUS ANIMAL IN HER GROSS WAY, WITH HER CURLING LASHES AND THE DELICATE POWN ON HER SHINY SNOUT THAT COARSENEED TO BRISTLES AROUND HER EARS, AND THE OILY FETCHING LOOK IN HER DARK BROWN EYES.

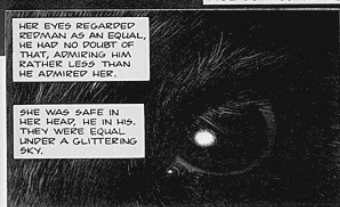
REDMAN, A CITY BOY, HAD SELDOM SEEN THE LIVING TRUTH BEHIND, OR PREVIOUS TO, THE MEAT ON HIS PLATE. THIS WONDERFUL PORKER CAME AS A REVELATION.

THE SOW WAS BEAUTIFUL, FROM HER SNUFFLING SNOUT TO THE DELICATE COCKSCREW OF HER TAIL, A SEDUCTRESS ON TROTTERS.



HER EYES REGARDED REDMAN AS AN EQUAL, HE HAD NO DOUBT OF THAT, ADMIRING HIM RATHER LESS THAN HE ADMIRED HER.

SHE WAS SAFE IN HER HEAD, HE IN HIS. THEY WERE EQUAL UNDER A GLITTERING SKY.



SOON SHE SEEMED TO HAVE THE SUM OF HIM, AND GRUNTING QUIETLY SHE RETURNED TO THE COOL OF THE INTERIOR.

THE AUDIENCE WAS OVER.





THAT NIGHT HE WENT TO FIND LACEY.

ARE YOU WELL?

DO YOU LIKE BEING ALONE?

YOU CAN'T STAY HERE FOREVER, YOU KNOW.



LISTEN TO ME, LACEY. I WANT YOU AND I TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER. BUT I CAN'T HELP YOU IF YOU WON'T TALK TO ME, CAN I?

NO, SIR.



WHY DID YOU MENTION KEVIN HENESSEY'S NAME TO ME LAST WEEK? HE ESCAPED, DIDN'T HE?

HE'S HERE. HE NEVER WENT AWAY.

WHAT? YOU MAAA HE DIDN'T ESCAPE?



HE'S CLEVER, SIR. HE PLANNED EVERYTHING. ALL OF IT. HE ~~HENESSEY~~, YOU KNOW. HE DON'T CARE ABOUT WALLS. DEAD PEOPLE DON'T CARE ABOUT NOTHING LIKE THAT.

DEAD, A SMALLER WORD THAN ALIVE, BUT IT TOOK THE BREATH AWAY.



ARE YOU SAYING HENESSEY'S DEAD?

HE IS, SIR. THEY ALL KNOW HE IS.



HE HANGED HIMSELF... WITH THE PIGS.



IF HENESSEY WERE DEAD, HOW COULD HE BE HERE?

DON'T YOU BELIEVE IN GHOSTS, SIR?

SO TRANSPARENT A SOLUTION, IT FLUMMOXED REP MAN. HENESSEY WAS DEAD, YET HENESSEY WAS HERE. HENCE HENESSEY WAS A GHOST.



NO, BOY. NO, I DON'T.

YOU'LL SEE... YOU'LL SEE.

IN THE STY AT THE PERIMETER OF THE GROUNDS, THE GREAT, NAMELESS SOW WAS HUNGRY.



SHE JUDGED THE RHYTHM OF THE DAYS, AND WITH THEIR PROGRESSION HER DESIRES GREW. SHE KNEW THAT THE TIME FOR STALE SLOPS IN A TROUGH WAS PAST. OTHER APPETITES HAD TAKEN THE PLACE OF THOSE PIGGY PLEASURES.

SHE HAD A TASTE, SINCE THE FIRST TIME, FOR FOOD WITH A CERTAIN TEXTURE, A CERTAIN RESONANCE. IT WASN'T FOOD SHE WOULD DEMAND ALL THE TIME, ONLY WHEN THE NEED CAME ON HER, NOT A GREAT DEMAND: ONCE IN A WHILE, TO GOBBLE AT THE HAND THAT FED HER.

TWO BOYS APPROACHED, RESPECT AND CAUTION IN EVERY STEP. SHE MADE THEM NERVOUS, AND UNDERSTANDABLY SO.

DIDN'T SHE SPEAK, WHEN ANGERED, IN THAT POSSESSED VOICE, BENDING HER FAT, PORKY MOUTH TO TALK WITH A STOLEN TONGUE?

WOULDN'T SHE STAND ON HER BACK TROTTERS SOMETIMES, DARK AND IMPERIAL, AND DEMAND THAT THE SMALLEST BOYS BE SENT INTO HER SHADOW TO SUCKLE HER, NAKED LIKE HER FARROW?

ALL THIS SHE DID. AND WORSE.

TONIGHT, THE BOYS KNEW, THEY HAD NOT BROUGHT THE SWEET WHITE MEAT THAT SHE HAD ASKED FOR IN THAT OTHER VOICE OF HER.

THE NOURISHMENT SHE REALLY CRAVED, THE MEAT THAT HAD BEEN PURSUED AND TERRIFIED TO ENGORGE THE MUSCLE, THEN BRUISED LIKE A HAMMERED STEAK FOR HER DELECTATION, THAT MEAT WAS UNDER SPECIAL PROTECTION. IT WOULD TAKE A WHILE TO COAX IT TO THE SLAUGHTER.

WELL?

THE VOICE WAS UNMISTAKABLE IN THEIR EARS. HIS VOICE, OUT OF THE MOUTH OF THE PIG.

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU WANTED. WE'RE SORRY.

WE'LL GET HIM FOR YOU, SOON.

WHY NOT TONIGHT?

HE'S BEING PROTECTED. A NEW TEACHER. REDMAN.

THE SOW SEEMED TO KNOW IT ALL ALREADY. SHE REMEMBERED THE CONFRONTATION ACROSS THE WALL, THE WAY HE'D STARED AT HER AS THOUGH SHE WAS A ZOOLOGICAL SPECIMEN. SO THAT WAS HER ENEMY, THAT OLD MAN. SHE'D HAVE HIM. OH, YES.

THE BACON SMELT BAD, BUT THE SOW NEVERTHELESS MADE WET NOISES OF ENTHUSIASM. MAYBE SHE HAD FORGIVEN THEM.

GO ON, GIVE HER THE MEAT!

CHOMP
SNAP
SCLURK

THE SECOND, THIRD, FOURTH, FIFTH SHE GAVE THE SAME TREATMENT.

BUT WITH THE SIXTH AND LAST PIECE...

AAGGH!!!

SHE'D DONE ONLY A LITTLE DAMAGE, CONSIDERING ...

...JUST THE TOP OF HIS THUMB AND HALF HIS INDEX FINGER.

TOMORROW... NOT THIS OLD PIG MEAT. IT MUST BE WHITE--AND LACY! : SNORT?

YES, OF COURSE.

SHE THOUGHT THAT WAS A FINE JOKE.

WITHOUT FAIL / OR I COME FOR HIM MYSELF! DO YOU HEAR ME?

I COME FOR HIM MYSELF, WHEREVER HE'S HIDING, I WILL EAT HIM IN HIS BED IF I WISH. IN HIS SLEEP I WILL EAT OFF HIS FEET, THEN HIS LEGS, THEN HIS BALLS, THEN HIS HIPS...

...I WANT HIM. HE'S MINE.

THE GOVERNOR'S ROOM WAS LOCKED, AS IT HAD BEEN FOR A FULL WEEK NOW. EXPLANATIONS DIFFERED AS TO WHERE HE WAS, MEETINGS WITH FUNDING BODIES WAS A FAVORITE REASON TOLDED AMONGST THE STAFF, THOUGH THE SECRETARY CLAIMED SHE DIDN'T EXACTLY KNOW.



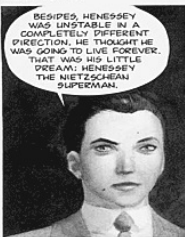
IF MR. REDMAN WANTED HE COULD LEAVE A MESSAGE, THE GOVERNOR WOULD GET IT.



SO IT WAS BACK TO LEVERTHAL TO TRY TO RECONCILE WHAT LACEY HAD TOLD HIM.

HENESSEY A SUICIDE? IT'S ANOTHER OF LACEY'S FABRICATIONS ONE MINUTE THE CHILD SAYS HE'S IN THE CENTER, THE NEXT HE'S DEAD

THE BOY CAN'T EVEN GET HIS STORY STRAIGHT.



BESIDES, HENESSEY WAS UNSTABLE IN A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT DIRECTION, HE THOUGHT HE WAS GOING TO LIVE FOREVER. THAT WAS HIS LITTLE DREAM: HENESSEY THE NIETZSCHEAN SUPERMAN.



HE HAD SOMETHING CLOSE TO CONTEMPT FOR THE COMMON HERD, AS FAR AS HE WAS CONCERNED, HE WAS A BREED APART, AS FAR BEYOND THE REST OF US AS HE WAS BEYOND THAT WRETCHED--

REDMAN KNEW SHE WAS GOING TO SAY "PIG," BUT SHE STOPPED JUST SHORT OF THE WORD.



--THOSE WRETCHED ANIMALS ON THE FARM.

HENESSEY SPENT TIME ON THE FARM?

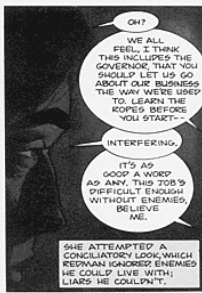
NO MORE THAN ANY OTHER BOY. MUCKING OUT ISN'T A VERY PLEASANT OCCUPATION, I CAN ATTEST TO THAT.



FRANKLY ALL THIS SOUNDS SUSPICIOUSLY LIKE SPECIAL PLEADING. THE BOY'S ONE OF MANY, NO UNIQUE PROBLEMS, AND NO PARTICULAR HOPE OF REDEMPTION.

REDEMPTION?

REHABILITATION, WHATEVER YOU CHOOSE TO CALL IT. LOOK, REDMAN, I'LL BE FRANK, THERE'S A GENERAL FEELING THAT YOU'RE NOT REALLY PLAYING BALL HERE.



OH?

WE ALL FEEL, I THINK THIS INCLUDES THE GOVERNOR, THAT YOU SHOULD LET US GO ABOUT OUR BUSINESS THE WAY WE'RE USED TO. LEARN THE ROPES BEFORE YOU START--

INTERFERING.

IT'S AS GOOD A WORD AS ANY, THIS JOB'S DIFFICULT ENOUGH WITHOUT ENEMIES, BELIEVE ME.

SHE ATTEMPTED A CONCILIATORY LOOK, WHICH REDMAN IGNORED. ENEMIES HE COULD LIVE WITH; LIARS HE COULDN'T.



THE CORRIDORS WERE EMPTY. IT WAS TELEVISION TIME, AND THE NIGHTLY WORSHIP OF THE BOX HAD BEGUN.

HE COULD HEAR GUNFIRE AND MUSIC, EVEN NOW, ECHOING DOWN THE CORRIDOR.

THE TELEPHONE WAS ON THE HOOK. WHOEVER HAD CALLED HIM HAD TIRED OF WAITING, LEAVING NO MESSAGE. HE FELT GREATLY DISAPPOINTED NOT TO BE SPEAKING TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD, LIKE CRUSOE SEEING A SAIL, ONLY TO HAVE IT SWEEP BY HIS ISLAND?

HE CONTEMPLATED LEAVING LACEY'S LETTER ON THE DESK, BUT THOUGHT BETTER OF IT. HE HAD PROMISED TO PROTECT THE BOY'S INTERESTS, AND THAT HE WOULD DO, IF NECESSARY, HE'D POST THE LETTER HIMSELF.

THINKING OF NOTHING IN PARTICULAR, HE STARTED BACK TOWARDS THE WORKSHOP. VAGUE WISPS OF LINEASE FLOATED IN HIS SYSTEM, CLOGGING HIS RESPONSES.

LINEASE WAS ALL.
LINEASE AND --

--SILENCE.

THAT WAS WHAT WAS WRONG, THOUGH THE TELEVISION POPPED AND SCREAMED DOWN THE CORRIDOR, THERE WAS SILENCE ACCOMPANYING IT. NO WOLF-WHISTLES, NO CAT-CALLS.

THE RECREATION ROOM WAS EMPTY. THE OLD ARMCHAIRS AND GRAFFITI-CARVED STOOLS PLACED AROUND THE TELEVISION SET FOR AN AUDIENCE WHO HAD BETTER ENTERTAINMENT FOR THE EVENING.



THERE'S
REALLY NO NEED
TO GO AFTER
HIM, SIR.

WHAT
IN GOD'S NAME
ARE YOU DOING,
SLAPE?

WE'RE
JUST PLAYING
A GAME. THERE'S
NO REAL HARM
IN IT. BEST
LEAVE WELL
ALONE.

I
TOLD
YOU TO
STAY WITH
LACEY.

HE RAN
OFF, SIR. I
COULDN'T STOP
HIM.

DAMN
YOU! WHICH
WAY DID HE
GO?

NO
NEED TO
LOSE YOUR
TEMPER,
SIR.

THE "SIR" WAS SLURRED: A
PARODY OF RESPECT. REDMAN
FOUND HIS HAND ITCHING TO
HIT THIS
PUS-FILLED
ADOLESCENT.

THE POINT OF THE KNIFE BIT THE FAT OF REDMAN'S
STOMACH, DRAWING BLOOD WARMLY. IT WENDED ITS
WAY DOWN INTO REDMAN'S GROIN. SLAPE WAS PRE-
PARED TO KILL HIM; NO DOUBT OF THAT. WHATEVER
THIS GAME WAS, SLAPE WAS HAVING A LITTLE FUN
ALL OF HIS OWN. KILLING TEACHER, IT WAS CALLED.

KEVIN
LIKES TO COME
OUT AND PLAY ONCE
IN A WHILE.

HENESESEY?

YES,
YOU LIKE
TO CALL US
BY OUR SECOND
NAMES, DON'T YOU?
THAT'S MORE
MANLY, ISN'T
IT?

KEVIN
NEVER WANTED
TO BE A MAN THOUGH,
YOU SEE, SIR. HE THOUGHT
ONCE YOU WERE A MAN, YOU
STARTED TO DIE, AND KEVIN
USED TO SAY HE'D
NEVER DIE.

NEVER
DIE.

NEVER.

I
WANT
TO MEET
HIM.

EVERYBODY
DOES, SIR. HE'S
CHARISMATIC. THAT'S THE
DOCTOR'S WORD FOR HIM:
CHARISMATIC.

I
WANT
TO MEET
THIS
CHARIS-
MATIC
FELLOW.

REDMAN TOOK THE KNIFE-HAND AT THE WRIST SO QUICKLY SLAPE HAD NO CHANCE TO PRESS THE WEAPON HOME. THE KNIFE DROPPED FROM HIS HAND AS REDMAN TOOK SLAPE IN A STRANGLE-HOLD.

WHERE'S
HENESSEY?
YOU TAKE ME
TO HIM.

DAMN!

REDMAN DROVE HIS KNEE INTO THE OTHER'S GROIN, FAST AND SHARP. SLAPE WANTED TO DOUBLE UP IN AGONY, BUT THE NECK-HOLD PREVENTED HIM.

THE KNEE ROSE
AGAIN, HARDER.

AND AGAIN.

AGAIN.

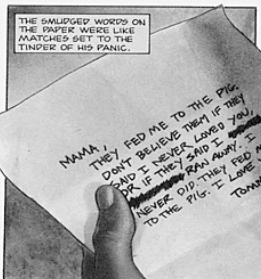
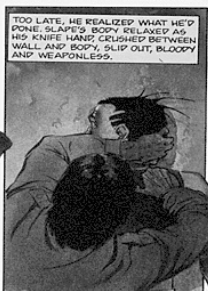
I
CAN HURT
YOU TWICE AS
BADLY AS YOU CAN
HURT ME. IF YOU
WANT TO GO ON
DOING THIS ALL
NIGHT I'M
HAPPY AS A
SANDBOY.

WHIMPERING WITH PAIN,
HIS FACE CRUMPLED SLAPE
SLID DOWN THE WALL INTO A FETAL POSITION, HANDS
BETWEEN HIS LEGS.

WHERE'S
LACEY?

WHERE
D'YOU THINK?
KEVIN'S GOT
HIM.

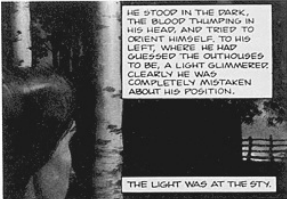
WHERE'S
KEVIN?





EVEN IN DAYLIGHT HE WASN'T SURE OF THE ROUTE TO THE FARM; IT WAS WORSE BY NIGHT. HE WAS VERY SOON LOST, SOMEWHERE BETWEEN THE PLAYING FIELD AND THE TREES.

IT WAS AS STILL OUTSIDE AS INSIDE, AS THOUGH THE WHOLE WORLD HAD BECOME AN INTERIOR: A SUFFOCATING ROOM BOUNDED BY A PAINTED CEILING OF CLOUDS.

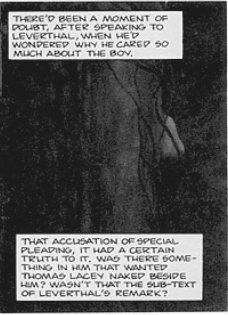


HE STOOD IN THE DARK, THE BLOOD THUMPING IN HIS HEAD, AND TRIED TO ORIENT HIMSELF. TO HIS LEFT, WHERE HE HAD GUESSED THE OUTHOUSES TO BE, A LIGHT GLIMMERED. CLEARLY HE WAS COMPLETELY MISTAKEN ABOUT HIS POSITION.

THE LIGHT WAS AT THE STY.



EVEN NOW, ALL HE COULD THINK OF WAS THE BOY'S EYES, HUGE AND DEMANDING, LOOKING DEEP INTO HIS.



THERE'D BEEN A MOMENT OF DOUBT, AFTER SPEAKING TO LEVERTHAL, WHEN HE'D WONDERED WHY HE CARED SO MUCH ABOUT THE BOY.

THAT ACCUSATION OF SPECIAL PLEADING, IT HAD A CERTAIN TRUTH TO IT. WAS THERE SOMETHING IN HIM THAT WANTED THOMAS LACEY NAKED BESIDE HIM? WASN'T THAT THE SUB-TEXT OF LEVERTHAL'S REMARK?



AHEAD THERE WERE FIGURES IN THE NIGHT, WANDERING AWAY FROM THE FARM, LIKE A CONGREGATION LEAVING A FUNERAL. THEY WALKED EVENLY IN THE DARK, EACH APART FROM THE OTHER, HEADS BOWED. IT WAS EERIE TO SEE THESE GODLESS DELINQUENTS SO SUBDUED BY REVERENCE.

A FEW FIGURES STILL LINGERED AROUND THE PIG-HOUSE. THERE WAS A NOISE FROM THE STY, THE SOUND OF THE SOW'S FEET ON STRAW AS SHE ACCEPTED THEIR STARES.

SOMEBODY WAS SPEAKING, BUT HE COULDN'T MAKE OUT WHO. AN ADOLESCENT'S VOICE, WITH A LILT TO IT.



AS THE VOICE HALTED IN ITS MONOLOGUE, THE WARDER AND ANOTHER OF THE BOYS BROKE RANK, AS IF DISMISSED, AND TURNED AWAY INTO THE DARK.

TIME WAS OF THE ESSENCE NOW. SOON THE FIRST OF THE CONGREGATION WOULD HAVE CROSSED THE FIELD AND BE BACK IN THE MAIN BUILDING. THEY'D SEE SLAP'S CORPSE, RAISE THE ALARM.



LEVERTHAL...
AND YOU--
BOY. ARE YOU
HENESSEY?



NO.
NO. NO.
NO. HENESSEY
IS HERE.



REDMAN WALKED THE FEW REMAINING YARDS TO THE WALL OF THE STY, EXPECTING AND NOT PARING TO EXPECT, THE STRAW AND THE BLOOD AND THE PIG AND LACEY. BUT LACEY WASN'T THERE.

WHERE'S
HENESSEY?

HERE.

THIS IS
A PIG.

SHE
ATE HIM.

SHE ATE
HIM, AND HE
SPEAKS OUT
OF HER.



DID
HENESSEY
HANG HIMSELF,
AS TOMMY
SAID?

YES.

IN
THE STY?

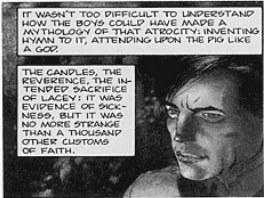
YES.





SUDDENLY THE PIG TOOK ON A DIFFERENT ASPECT. IN HIS IMAGINATION, HE SAW HER REACHING UP TO SNIFF AT THE FEET OF HENESSEY'S TWITCHING BODY, SENDING THE DEATH COMING OVER IT, SALIVATING AT THE THOUGHT OF ITS FLESH.

HE SAW HER LICKING THE DEW THAT OOZED FROM ITS SKIN AS IT ROTTED, LAPPING AT IT, NIBBLING DAINTILY AT FIRST, THEN DEVOURING IT.



IT WASN'T TOO DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND HOW THE BOYS COULD HAVE MADE A MYTHOLOGY OF THAT ATROCITY: INVENTING A GOD.

THE CANDLES, THE REVERENCE, THE INTENDED SACRIFICE OF LACEY: IT WAS EVIDENCE OF SICKNESS, BUT IT WAS NO MORE STRANGE THAN A THOUSAND OTHER CUSTOMS OF FAITH.



MAMA, THEY FED ME TO THE PIG.

NOT MAMA, HELP ME, SAVE ME. JUST: THEY GAVE ME TO THE PIG. ALL THIS WE COULD UNDERSTAND: THEY WERE CHILDREN. BUT THAT DIDN'T EXPLAIN LEVERTHAL.



SHE SPEAKS WITH HIS VOICE. SPEAKS IN TONGUES. YOU MIGHT SAY, YOU'LL HEAR HIM IN A WHILE, MY DARLING BOY.

YOU--AND HENESSEY?

DON'T LOOK SO HORRIFIED: HE WAS EIGHTEEN-- HAIR BLACKER THAN YOU'VE EVER SEEN. AND HE LOVED ME.

WHY DID HE HANG HIMSELF?

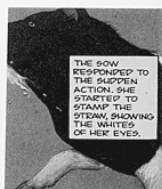


TO LIVE FOREVER, SO HE'D NEVER BE A MAN AND DIE.

WE DIDN'T FIND HIM FOR SIX DAYS, AND EVEN THEN SHE WOULDN'T LET ANYBODY NEAR HIM ONCE SHE HAD HIM TO HERSELF.

THE PIG, I MEAN. NOT THE DOCTOR.

EVERYONE LOVED KEVIN, YOU SEE. HE WAS BEAUTIFUL.



EVEN NOW, IN EXTREMIS, THE PIG WAS STILL A PIG. NO MIRACLES HERE: NO SPEAKING, NO PLEADING, IN TONGUES, THE ANIMAL PANICKED AS THE BLAZE SURROUNDED HER, CORNERING HER STAMPING BULK AND LICKING AT HER FLANKS.

THE AIR WAS FILLED WITH THE STENCH OF SINGeing BACON AS THE FLAMES RAN UP HER SIDES AND OVER HER HEAD, CHASING THROUGH HER BRISTLES LIKE A GRASS-FIRE.

HER VOICE WAS A PIG'S VOICE, HER COMPLAINTS A PIG'S COMPLAINTS. HYSTERICAL GRUNTS ESCAPED HER LIPS AND SHE HURTTLED ACROSS THE FORECOURT OF THE STY AND OUT OF THE BROKEN FENCE, TRAMPLING LEVERTHAL.

THE SOW'S BODY, STILL BURNING, WAS A MAGIC THING IN THE NIGHT AS SHE CAREERED THROUGH THE TREES, WEAVING ABOUT IN HER PAIN.

HER CRIES DID NOT DIMINISH AS THE DARK ATE HER UP, THEY SEEMED JUST TO ECHO BACK AND FORTH ACROSS THE FIELD, UNABLE TO FIND A WAY OUT OF THE LOCKED ROOM.

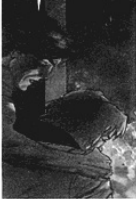
REDMAN STEPPED OVER
LEVERTHAL'S FIRE-RIPPEN
CORPSE, AND INTO THE
PIG-HOUSE.

LACEY WAS THERE.



HE WAS ALIVE.

COME
ON--IT'S
ALL RIGHT.
COME
ON.



HE STOOD UPRIGHT, AND SOMETHING
BRUSHED HIS HAIR. REDMAN FELT A
LITTLE RAIN OF WORMS ACROSS HIS
FACE, AND GLANCED UP.

THERE HE WAS.



HENESSEY, OR WHAT WAS LEFT OF HIM.

HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR THE THICK SMOKE,
THE SMELL OF THE BODY WOULD HAVE
BEEN OVERPOWERING.



AS IT WAS, REDMAN WAS
SIMPLY REVOLTED, AND
HIS REVULSION GAVE
STRENGTH TO HIS ARM.



THE BOY'S EYES WERE BUTTON-BRIGHT, LUNATIC-BRIGHT. THEY SAID FUTILITY.

BUT LACEY SEEMED TO BE STIRRING FROM HIS STRICKEN STATE WITH EVERY STEP THEY TOOK AWAY FROM THE FARM.



LACEY WAS WHIMPERING NOW, NO WORDS AS YET, BUT SOUND AT LEAST. IT WAS A GOOD SIGN, A SIGN REDMAN NEEDED. HE'D HAD ABOUT HIS FILL OF INSANITY.

IT WAS TIME TO FIND A PHONE AND CALL THE POLICE.



REDMAN TRIED NOT TO THINK OF THE PIG. IT MUST BE DEAD BY NOW, SURELY.

BUT AS THEY RAN, THERE SEEMED TO BE A NOISE IN THE EARTH AS SOMETHING HUGE KEPT PACE WITH THEM, CONTENT TO KEEP ITS DISTANCE, WAKY NOW BUT RELENTLESS IN ITS PURSUIT.



LACEY HAD FALLEN SILENT AGAIN, BUT HIS EXPRESSION WAS NO LONGER SO MANIC; IT LOOKED AS THOUGH CLEANSING TEARS MIGHT BE CLOSE. HE SHIFFED, MADE NOISES IN HIS THROAT.

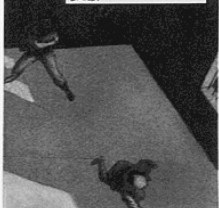
AHEAD, THE VESTIBULE WAS IN DARKNESS, SOMEBODY HAD SMASHED THE BULB RECENTLY.



THE TRICK WAS SO QUICK HE LET THE BOY GO BEFORE HE COULD PREVENT HIMSELF.



NO MATTER, HE COULDN'T GET FAR. FOR ONCE, REDMAN WAS GLAD THE PLACE HAD WALLS AND BARS.



REDMAN CROSSED THE PARKING VESTIBULE TO THE SECRETARY'S OFFICE. NOTHING MOVED. WHOEVER HAD BROKEN THE BULB WAS KEEPING VERY QUIET, VERY STILL.



DAWN!

REDMAN DOUBLED BACK TO THE GOVERNOR'S ROOM. THERE WAS A TELEPHONE THERE; HE'D NOT BE STOPPED BY VANDALS.



THE SMELL INSIDE MADE THE CITY SEEM SWEET.

THE PIG.



THE PIG.

THE PIG...



A SOUND. HE TURNED AND
MET THE BLOW FULL FACE.

WOK!

THE ROOM MOTTLED,
AND WENT WHITE.

THE VESTIBULE WAS NO LONGER
DARK. CANDLES WERE BURNING,
IT SEEMED HUNDREDS OF THEM,
IN EVERY CORNER, ON EVERY
EDGE.

BUT THEN HIS HEAD WAS SWIM-
MING, HIS EYESIGHT BLURRED
WITH CONCUSSION. IT COULD
HAVE BEEN A SINGLE CANDLE,
MULTIPLIED BY SENSES THAT
COULD NO LONGER BE TRUSTED
TO TELL THE TRUTH.

HE DID NOT QUITE KNOW HOW HE
COULD BE STANDING, FOR HIS
LEGS FELT NUMB AND USELESS
BENEATH HIM. AT THE PERIPHERY
OF HIS VISION, BEYOND THE
LIGHT OF THE CANDLES, HE
COULD HEAR PEOPLE TALKING.

NO, NOT REALLY TALKING.
THEY WEREN'T PROPER
WORDS. THEY WERE NON-
SENSE SOUNDS, MADE BY
PEOPLE WHO MAY OR MAY
NOT HAVE BEEN THERE.

THEN HE HEARD THE GRUNT,
THE LOW, ASTHMATIC GRUNT
OF THE SOW, AND STRAIGHT
AHEAD SHE EMERGED FROM
THE SWIMMING LIGHT OF THE
CANDLES. SHE WAS BRIGHT
AND BEAUTIFUL NO LONGER.
HER FLANKS WERE CHARRED,
HER BEADY EYES WITHERED,
HER SNOUT SOMEHOW TWISTED
OUT OF TRUE.

SHE HOBBOLED TOWARDS HIM VERY SLOWLY, AND VERY SLOWLY THE FIGURE ASTRIDE HER BECAME APPARENT.

IT WAS TOMMY LACEY, OF COURSE, NAKED AS THE DAY HE WAS BORN, HIS BODY AS PINK AND AS HAIRLESS AS ONE OF HER FALLOW, HIS FACE AS INNOCENT OF HUMAN FEELING.

TOMMY?

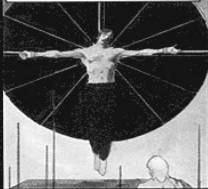
HIS EYES WERE NOW HER EYES, AS HE GUIDED THE GREAT SOW BY HER EARS, AND THE NOISE OF THE SOW, THE SNAFFLING SOUND, WAS NOT OUT OF THE PIG'S MOUTH, BUT OUT OF HIS. HIS WAS THE VOICE OF THE PIG.

ONLY THEN, AS THE PIG AND HER RIDER APPROACHED, DID REDMAN REGISTER WHY HE HADN'T FALLEN ON HIS FACE. THERE WAS A ROPE AROUND HIS NECK.

EVEN AS HE THOUGHT THE THOUGHT, THE NOOSE TIGHTENED, AND HE WAS HALLED OFF HIS FEET INTO THE AIR.



NO PAIN, BUT A TERRIBLE HORROR, WORSE, SO MUCH WORSE THAN PAIN, OPENED IN HIM. A GORGE OF LOSS AND REGRET, AND ALL HE WAS SANK AWAY WITH IT.



THROUGH THE GREYING AIR, REDMAN COULD SEE THE CURVE OF THE BOY'S SPINE, THE FLAWLESS SKIN OF HIS BACK.

HE SAW TOO THE KNOTTED ROPE THAT PROTRUDED FROM BETWEEN HIS PALE BUTTOCKS, THE END FRAMED FOR ALL THE WORLD LIKE THE TAIL OF A PIG.



HE LIKED TO THINK THAT SHE SUFFERED, AND WOULD SUFFER NOW UNTIL SHE DIED. IT WAS ALMOST SUFFICIENT, TO THINK OF THAT.

BUT THEN THE WORDS CAME. A BOY'S VOICE, LILTING.

THIS IS THE STATE OF THE BEAST, TO EAT AND BE EATEN.

THE SOW SMILED, AND REDMAN FELT, THOUGH HE HAD BELIEVED HIMSELF NUMB, THE FIRST SHOCK OF PAIN, AS LACEY'S TEETH BIT OFF A PIECE FROM HIS FOOT.



AND THE BOY CLAMBERED, SNORTING, UP HIS SAVIOR'S BODY TO KISS OUT HIS LIFE.



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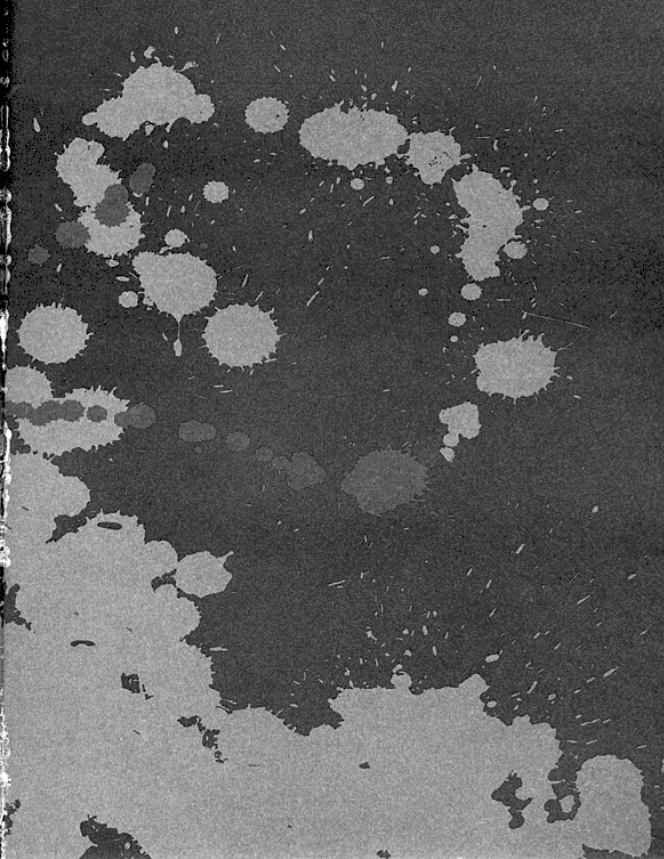
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